OLD · ENGLISH · FURNITURE

FREDERICK FENN & B WYLLIE

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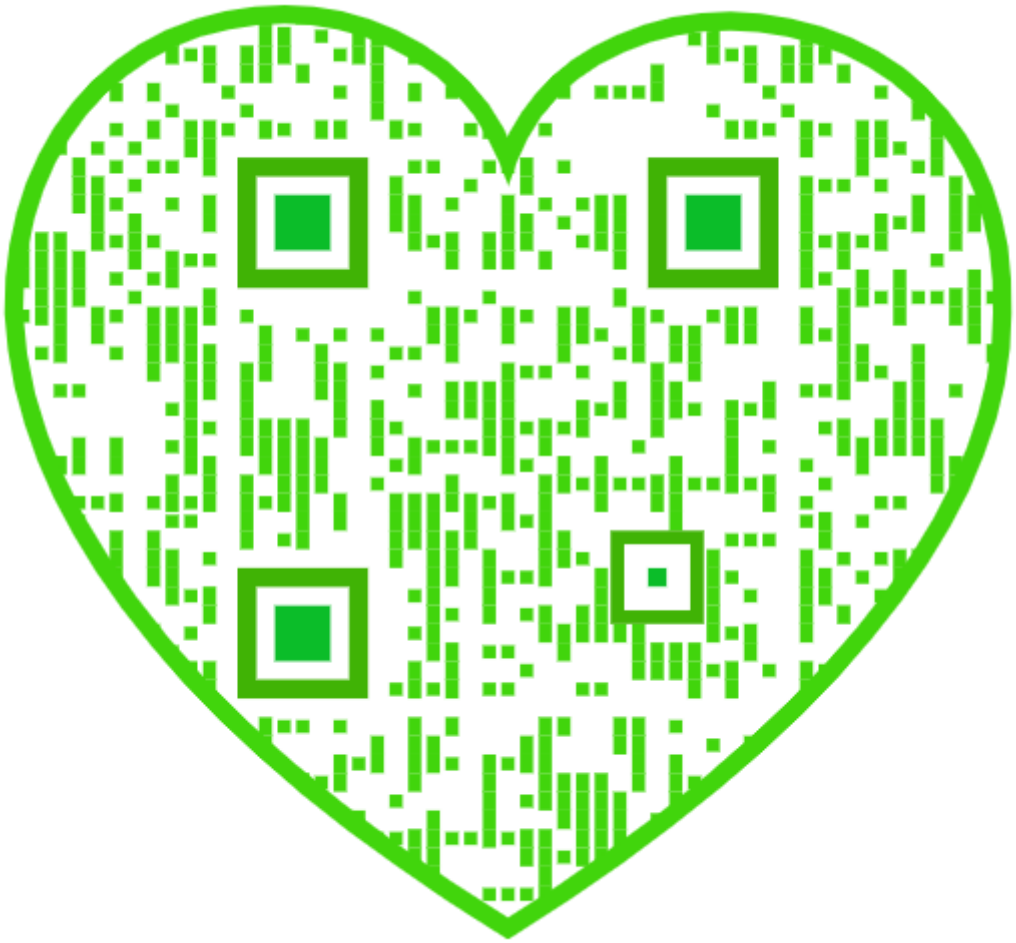

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OLD ENGLISH FURNITURE

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EARLY ENGLISH CARVED OAK BEDSTEAD.
(At the School of Art Needlework, South Kensington.)

OLD ENGLISH FURNITURE

BY

FREDERICK FENN

& B. WYLLIE

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OAK DINING OR SIDE TABLE. Tudor period. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) The chief features of this piece are the undecorated struts, nearly square in section, the cutting off of the corners of the square of the legs at the top and bottom of the turned part, and the carved brackets.

OLD ENGLISH FURNITURE

THE FIRST CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION

HEN I first began, in a small way, to collect a few pieces of old English furniture, the present craze was almost in its infancy. There were, of course, a host of distinguished collectors, but the vast army of small bargain hunters had not sprung into being. Most people were then content to furnish according to the house-furnisher's taste, and you did not hear every couple setting up housekeeping chatter about old oak and Chippendale. The modern movement is undoubtedly a change in the right direction, for despite the fact that it has created a demand for and brought into existence a vast array of bad imitations of the work of the eighteenth century masters, these copies are an improvement on what went before. It does violence to one's feelings to see the twelve by ten drawing-room in a suburban villa furnished with "old carved

oak" (made in Belgium or the Midlands) backed by an "art" wall-paper, or to see cottage chairs of the Chippendale period in the drawing-rooms of the wealthy; but at least these things show a hankering after improvement. It is not every one who has instinctive feeling for what is beautiful in design and correct in form—not every one who is born with a sensitiveness which is outraged when a beautiful piece of furniture is insulted by being placed in unsympathetic surroundings, and I am not at all sure that the vast majority are not much to be congratulated on the circumstance. The modest collector, who has scraped up a little knowledge and is the easy prey of the modern manufacturer, often forgets, if he ever knew, that the furniture of the great makers was intended for certain styles of rooms. The oak-panelled rooms and tapestry-hung walls took their dignified solid oak and exquisite walnut-wood work, and the painted rooms of a later period show up the dainty work of Sheraton, Adams, and Hepplewhite. Divorced from their proper surroundings, you miss half the effect which the designer saw. I do not suggest that there are not a fair number of people who have this inborn knowledge which

OAK DINING TABLE. Tudor period. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) This table is probably a later one than that shown in the preceding illustration. The struts are no longer square in section and are slightly ornamented by grooving. The square parts of the legs are noticeably smaller and shorter, leaving no room for brackets, which shows that the tendency towards lightening furniture had already begun. The ball feet are an interesting feature.

enables them to detect at once the false from the genuine, and approximately date every piece of furniture. I am not prepared to say that I am one of them, but I wish here to express my thanks firstly, to Mrs. C. W. Wyllie, whose intuitive knowledge exceeds that of any one I have met, and who has come to my assistance in the writing of this book; secondly, to Mr. James Orrock for allowing me to include certain photographs of examples in his fine collection; and thirdly, to Mr. S. E. Letts, who has also lent photographs, and whose knowledge of Chippendale furniture is, I imagine, unrivalled in England. I am particularly glad to include specimens of Mr. Orrock's collection, because I do not think it is sufficiently widely known how much he has done to uphold the merits of English furniture, to insist on its undoubted superiority in workmanship to French furniture, and to arouse a feeling of national pride in the work of the best makers. He gathered round him an almost priceless collection, and though it has now been dispersed under the hammer, there was at one time no better education for the would-be collector than a visit to his house under the owner's intelligent guidance.

And now to go back for a moment. When some years ago I first began buying a little furniture, one of the charms of acquiring old things was that, apart from their æsthetic value, they were very much cheaper than their modern equivalents. A beautiful Sheraton chest of drawers, with dressing-table fittings, did not cost more than a japanned deal atrocity. Chairs could be acquired from half a crown upwards. A bureau was the cheapest form of writing-table in existence, and those fine old wardrobes and tall chests of drawers stood neglected in dark corners of dealers' shops. Now all is changed; the genuine antique is hard to find. It is either on its way to America or its price is prohibitive to those of moderate means. There is one direction though in which the enthusiast, with a little knowledge, can do real service. I take a little credit to myself that I have saved sundry beautiful pieces from the rubbish heap. Few people are courageous enough to buy a much dilapidated article which appears to be tottering on broken legs to the wood heap, but I have been occasionally marvellously repaid for so daring. I have for long had the services of an extremely

skilful and intelligent workman at my command, and nothing in my possession gives me greater pleasure than a little Stuart cabinet which he took in hand when it was in the last stages of decrepitude, and to which he devoted three weeks of careful work. It is one of the curious things about the poor collector that he will reluctantly pass by a table or cabinet offered to him in perfect condition for, say £25—considering that the price is beyond him; but if he can buy it for, say £10, he will cheerfully pay another £15 for having it restored. Restoration is often difficult, but it saves many a gem from a terrible fate. I have been over factories in the Midlands and elsewhere and seen in full swing the horrid work of transforming genuine but faulty pieces of furniture. Beautiful square pianos are transmogrified into secretaires; carved chests are cut up into cupboards; chairs are taken to pieces, and bits of the old wood are put into half a dozen new imitations. The clever ignoramus is then allowed to scrape a genuine leg with his pocket-knife, and goes away quite satisfied about the antiquity of the wood, and hugging himself with the thought that he has secured a bargain, although nine-tenths of the chair

are new. This same clever ignoramus is responsible for much. It is for his delectation that fine and whole pieces of china are broken up and then rivetted together; he then snaps up greedily a thing which he would not have touched in the first instance. The little knowledge about old furniture, which every one has nowadays, so far from alarming the dealer in frauds has made him rub his hands. No fool is so easily imposed upon as the clever fool.

One more point, and that is that it is a mistake to suppose that the finest furniture cannot be made nowadays. A piece of furniture is beautiful in itself, not by reason of its age; and the most finished workmanship can be put into anything at the present day. The great difficulty lies in the fact that the public will not pay for the best work. Masters and men alike are afraid of spending too long over a given task: they know it does not pay. The best work is necessarily very costly, and I know, when I have had a skilled workman repairing things for me, my chief difficulty has been to make him take long enough over the task. He has felt that he had not enough work to show if he devoted a day to some tiny but all important detail.

EARLY CHEST, with "linen-fold" carving and old lock. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) This is a particularly interesting chest, first on account of the great beauty of the "linen-fold" carving, and secondly on account of the short centre panel, obviously made to allow space for the lock.

EARLY CHEST, with "linen-fold" carving. Henry VII or Henry VIII period. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) This piece is interesting by reason of the carving being on the spandrils and framing as well as on the panels. The brackets under the front legs are also noteworthy.

Lastly, I would say that I have bought furniture in all parts of the country from Dundee to Penzance, but there is really no occasion for the Londoner to go wandering. London is the happiest hunting-ground in the world, and those who are able to add anything rare and beautiful to their household treasures, will find the possession of it a constant joy. You never tire of the really good thing as you do of something emanating from a bad period. Above all, do not sell anything. A bad financial crisis may be weathered, but the treasure which you parted with in an evil hour becomes yearly more difficult to acquire again. Buying good furniture is a sound investment, for its value constantly increases, but do not regard a hobby in this light. You only get an æsthetic dividend, and the time comes when you would as soon sell your chief gems of furniture as a mother would sell her children.

My chief object in this book is to point out what admirable taste and fitness the great masters showed, in the different periods, in constructing furniture which was at once beautiful and perfectly adapted to people's requirements, and to show the collector of moderate means what is worth buying.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

OAK FURNITURE

CHAUCER mentions "wicker chairs" in one of his Canterbury Tales, otherwise we might presume that oak was "the only wear" in furniture up to the end of Henry VIII.'s reign, as we have no remains of anything but oak furniture of that early period. Probably the oldest pieces of oak furniture are the long narrow tables on massive pillared legs, with stretchers or struts at a short distance from the floor. These stretchers served to strengthen the table and also made a rest for the feet, in the days when carpets were unknown and rooms were very far from draught proof. The tops of these tables are one and a half to two inches thick, and generally their sole decoration consists of some carving on the frame just under the top, as is shown in Plates 2 and 3.

It is difficult to date these tables; probably none are later than Elizabeth; how much earlier they may be one can only guess, but that they are not later is certain. Most people err in thinking them much less old than

PLAIN OAK YORKSHIRE DOWER-CHEST, with drawers. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) This chest may be of a fairly late date, as this kind was made in Yorkshire until about 100 years ago. The form of the rising panels, however, belongs to the Stuart period, and the chest is pegged together with wooden pegs after the manner of quite remote times. There is a curious hinged flap on the inside to hold up the lid.

LARGE OAK GATE-LEG TABLE. Stuart period. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) This table possesses very fine deeply cut spiral legs.

they really are. Mr. Seymour Lucas, R.A. (who is one of the best authorities on antique oak) had formerly in his possession an extremely fine one with the top inlaid with bog oak and holly, which he dated Henry VIII. It is the only one I have ever heard of that was decorated in this way; the two illustrated are probably of earlier date. These very massive dining- or side-tables are so thick and substantial in every way, that there is no reason why they should not date from the earliest times of English history, since even those that have been put away in a barn or disused stable for centuries, are not materially damaged. There is really nothing short of fire, or chopping them up, that will get rid of them, and most of them probably date from the early Henrys. There is no furniture, in my opinion, which shows traces of the influence of the Roman occupation of Britain, unless it is these long-shaped massive tables, which may have been derived from furniture in use by the Romans, for the same long-shaped tables appear in early Italian pictures, and we may reasonably suppose them to be the outcome of Roman furniture.

Some of the dower-chests must also date from the Tudor kings, possibly from the

Conquest, or may be even from Saxon times. Oak settles and oak dressers—plain, not inlaid—are often very old too; though, being of thinner wood, it is, unlikely that any of the earliest of them remain to us. The dower-chest, filled with linen of her own spinning, which was each bride's possession when she went to her new home, was really the beginning of all our elaborate wardrobes and chests of drawers and cabinets. It shows the dawn of the first idea for furniture, as distinct from the necessary tables and chairs. Apparently even the poorest bride would not, or could not, be married without one; for there are immense numbers of them — and genuine old ones too—remaining all over the country. The earliest, and rarest of these are plain, with the lid made of one very thick plank, with great wrought-iron hinges on the inside of the lid. They are not especially beautiful; they are rude and heavy, but interesting as showing the beginning of the dower-chest. When these first chests and tables were made, probably the planks were all cut from the felled tree with an axe, which would explain why the wood is so thick. After the plain thick-plank chests came the carved chests, the finest of which

SIX-LEGGED, SIX-SIDED OAK TABLE. Tudor period. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) This is a very fine piece. Its most noteworthy features are the thickness of the top, and the angle-wise placing of the heavy struts.

SMALL OAK GATE-LEG TABLE. Jacobean period. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) This table is chiefly remarkable for the smallness of its size. The pattern of the legs is a good one.

ROUND OAK CLUB-FOOTED TABLE. Early XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This form of table is common in mahogany, and less usual, though not rare, in oak.

show the Norman arch and sometimes the Tudor rose. Genuine oak chests with the Norman arch and the Tudor rose are not plentiful; and if any reader of this should come across one, I counsel him, or her, to buy it, no matter what its condition.

One of the objects of this book is to try to persuade people to save what little remains of the oldest furniture which still exists in the remote parts of the country, before it is used for firewood. And here let me say generally that the shabbiest, dustiest, greyest looking piece of old oak, may be made quite beautiful. It should first be scrubbed with a good scrubbing brush and hot water and soap, then allowed to get thoroughly dry; and afterwards well rubbed, first with boiled oil, "to feed it," as the carpenters say, and then with good bees-wax and turpentine, to give it a wear resisting surface. Let no one be afraid of the shabbiness of old things, they only want cleaning and rubbing up; they cannot be scratched or warped or blistered, for they are so hard that they will turn the edge of the very best steel tools, and there is no easy way of hurting them short of burning. One reason why so many of these oldest oak pieces have survived until

now, is that the labour of chopping them up for firewood would have been so great that it has been found easier to gather sticks! If you chance upon one of these oldest oak chests, with the lid in one piece, and its long wrought-iron hinges, you may feel you have found a prize; if, in addition, it happens to retain its old iron lock, you may know that you have lighted on something dear to the heart of the collector.

Next after the plain or carved chest with the lid in one piece, comes the chest with panels, varying from 3 feet 5 inches to 8 feet long. Those of the smaller size, a little carved and really genuine and ancient, are still very plentiful and very moderate in price. They should be brown in colour, or if nearly black, they should not be a purple black, and the little pip marks in the grain of the oak should be lighter than the surrounding wood; in stained or fumed oak these pip marks are darker than the surrounding wood, because they absorb the stain more readily than the rest of the wood.

It is easy to give directions by which the amateur may know really old oak so far as the wood is concerned. The worst of it is that many fine old oak chests, tables, dressers, etc.,

SMALL OBLONG OAK TABLE. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) The dog-tooth carving and the pattern of the turned legs prove this to be a table of an early date. The feet have obviously been cut off at some time.

OAK PRESS. XVI century. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) This press is a remarkably fine example on account of its untouched condition. The design of the carving is unusually good.

which were genuine, simple and perfectly plain, have been cheaply carved by the sinful antique furniture dealer; and when utterly ruined, they are sold to the inexperienced as old carved oak. Nothing but talent in the first place, and experience in the second, which comes from studying really fine old carving and learning to understand its character and details, will teach the non-expert the difference between these spoilt oak articles and the valuable antique carved treasures. One can only say live and observe and learn.

The longest oak chest I have seen was 8 feet 6 inches in length, decorated all over its panels with the carving, geometrical in pattern and of uniform depth, which looks like fretwork laid on. This chest was called "the hutch" by its owners, who told me it had always been so called and was an old family possession. "Hutch" is a well-known old term for these chests, though one does not often come across it in use nowadays. Quite the most desirable thing in oak chests, is one with what is called "linen-fold" panels. Linen-fold carving was the fashionable thing in Henry VIII.'s time. There is one room in Hampton Court Palace, in the older part, entirely panelled with it, so that any linen-fold

chest probably dates from then or the two or three following reigns. One of the illustrations (Plate 4) shows a very fine chest, which is in the possession of Mr. Seymour Lucas. This is especially interesting because it has its old iron lock on the front, but its original lid appears to have been replaced at some time by the present one, which is slightly too large. This panelling may be found in many country houses. At Coles Park, Buntingford, on the estate of Mr. R. P. Greg, there is an old dower house in which several rooms have this panelling in fine preservation. Another illustration of a "linen-fold" chest (Plate 5) is given because the spandrils are carved, which is rare and curious, though not, I think, admirable. This also is in the possession of Mr. Seymour Lucas.

The most ordinary carved oak chest is one with a little carving along the top spandril just under the lid; if dated, so much the better. Another very common kind, peculiar to Yorkshire and the northern counties, is the plain panelled chest, rather large and high, with two, three, or four drawers under the chest. The illustration (Plate 6) shows one with two drawers. I imagine there must have been some dower-chests made inlaid with

OAK PANELLING FROM SIZERGH CASTLE. Late XVI century. (*In South Kensington Museum.*) This oak panelling is inlaid with bog-oak and hollywood like some of the oak furniture.

OAK CABINET, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Stuart period. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) Though this may be considered an English piece it was probably made by a foreign workman. The lions' heads, carved figures, and the capitals of the columns are un-English, whilst the spiral legs and curved struts are characteristically Stuart.

holly and bog-oak, as there are dressers, beds, and cabinets with that ornamentation, but I have never chanced to see one; nor have I seen an English chest inlaid with mother-of-pearl or decorated with mouldings in what we call the Jacobean style.

The commonest form of oak furniture,—using commonest in its meaning of plentiful—after dower-chests is the gate-leg table, and the club-footed table. The gate-leg table may be of any size. The present writer has one that is so small that it is an ideal sofa table for serving afternoon tea on, and another which is large enough to seat ten people. These are both oval tables of solid oak, with the tops fixed on to the framework by large oak pegs. Illustrations (Plates 7 and 9) of both of these are given in order that the difference in the legs may be pointed out. Those of the large table are spiral legs of considerable beauty, and probably date from Charles I. or Cromwell. These spiral legs are, unluckily, rare; the most usual form being variants on the turned legs of the smaller table. I do not advocate the refusal of any gate-legged table unless it has spiral legs; but what I do say emphatically is, buy any table, however bad its condition, even if only the framework

is left and a new top is necessary, if it has these beautiful spiral legs. Neither of the pieces illustrated possesses a drawer, though one drawer is often met with in such tables. The club-footed table is more attractive to me, personally, than the gate-leg table. It is of a later date and is fairly common in oak, but more common in mahogany; it is generally oval in shape when both leaves are extended, but I have one (Plate 10) which is round. It is the only round oak one I have ever come across. There is a still finer form of club-footed table with high-shouldered (cabriole) legs, which occurs in both oak and mahogany. There are many forms of small tables in oak with one or three drawers. These have turned legs with strengthening rails at the foot (Plate 11); the later ones have cabriole or club-footed legs without the strengthening rails. They are all interesting, but the piece to look for is one with its original brasses. Even if only one of these brasses should remain, it will serve to have copies made from, and the table can thus be made complete. Never make the tasteless mistake of taking off the old handles because they are incomplete; get some good brass worker to make the best copy he can of the

CLUB-FOOTED OAK WRITING TABLE, with adjustable slab. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This is probably an early attempt at a writing table or desk, before the bureau form was evolved, and might date back to Elizabeth or Henry VIII. The table contains a narrow pen drawer and deep well above, and three lower drawers. The brasses, which are original, are of the engraved type common on Stuart furniture.

ROOM AT LENHAM COURT, KENT. (*By permission of Mrs. A. W. Elam.*) The settle shown in the illustration has a curious fixed smoker's box.

one that is original, always supposing that it is original, which is most likely to be the case if the set of handles and key plates is not complete.

Large carved oak presses chiefly belong to the North of England and the Lake Country. They are not to be picked up for an old song nowadays, but can generally be bought, if they are especially wished for, for anything from £25 upwards. The one illustrated (Plate 12), by kind permission of Mr. Seymour Lucas, is a handsome one of the ordinary form, with characteristic carving, and it is in an unusually untouched condition. Then there are the so-called Jacobean oak chests of drawers, with mouldings put on in patterns, which should have drop brass handles, and are always desirable.

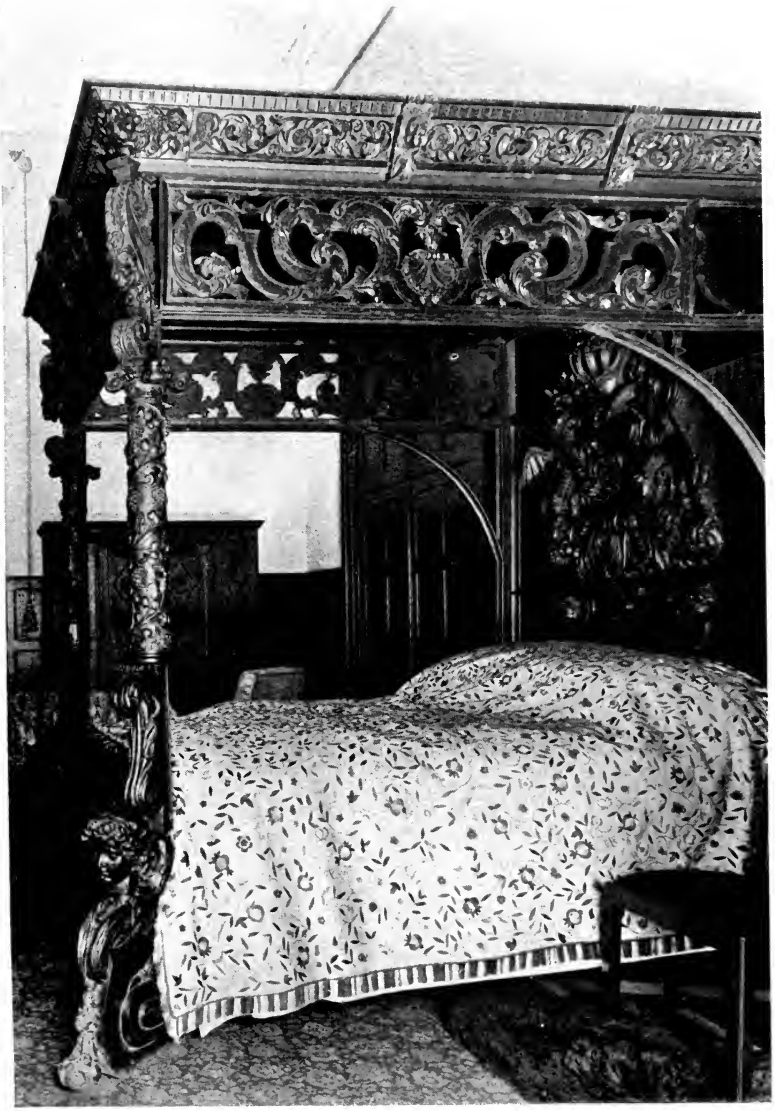
Next we come to inlaid oak. I do not think any one knows who brought the fashion of inlaying into this country, or quite where it dates from. It is certainly later in date than the earliest carving, though it may belong to as early a period as Edward VI., or Elizabeth, judging from the panelled room from Sizergh Castle in the South Kensington Museum (Plate 13), which is inlaid with bog-oak and holly in the characteristic pattern found on

inlaid oak furniture. I have seen two oak bedsteads of exceeding beauty, both inlaid with bog-oak and holly in this manner; both were also decorated with carving. In fact, carving and inlay in oak seem to have been considered the right thing at one period, and that a very beautiful period.

To come to still more elaborate oak furniture, there are cabinets of the early Stuart period, which were carved and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. These are believed to have been made by Italian workmen, who were brought over to the Eastern counties by one of the numerous patrons of art at that time, as all that have been found have come from that district. This would explain the foreign, or, more strictly speaking, un-English character of these particular pieces, which would otherwise be puzzling. Their workmanship is undoubtedly English, though their feeling is not. The one illustrated (Plate 14) is a specially good one from Mr. Seymour Lucas's collection.

Here, perhaps, mention should be made of a detail to be looked for in early chests of drawers, or tables with drawers in them, namely, what are technically called double runners. These are grooves in the sides of

CARVED OAK FLOUR HUTCH. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) Plain flour hutches are still to be found in the Eastern counties, but not with carving like that on the one shown in the illustration, which is totally different in character from most other English carving on oak. The origin of the design may have been Scandinavian. It is difficult to assign any date to this piece.



OAK BEDSTEAD at Goodwood House, Sussex. Stuart period. This bedstead is very richly carved, the pillars with enwreathed floral designs, and the tester with characteristic perforated work.

the drawers about halfway up the sides, which run on mouldings in the inside of the chest, thus preventing the drawers from shaking as they pull in and out, and also serving to hold them up when they are pulled out to more than half their length; a precaution which was more necessary then, since the depth, *i.e.* length from back to front of the drawers, was considerably greater than it is in modern furniture.

In writing of oak furniture, mention must also be made of the carved-oak desk and Bible-box, of which many examples exist all over the country. Strictly speaking, these must be regarded as etcetras, not as furniture. The club-footed oak writing-table (Plate 15), is obviously the outcome of the desk placed upon legs. After this was evolved the bureau, which is one of the most usual as well as most useful pieces of antique furniture of later date. Bureaux, of plain oak, generally with one or more secret drawers, and often with a well, used to be as plentiful as apples in autumn and almost as cheap. This was when writing-tables were the fashion, and before the public taste had revolted from the gentility of early, or rather middle, Victorian furniture. Nowadays one must pay at least

£4 for a good oak bureau, though this is not an extravagant price for an article which is certainly worth £8 on its merits. It is well to reflect that, in spite of the enormous rise in the price of antique furniture, you may still buy a few things for far less than it would cost to reproduce them, even with modern machinery. If you want a piece really reproduced, with the beautiful joinery and careful workmanship accurately copied, you have to pay considerably more, *i.e.* £10 or £12 for the bureau which you now buy for £4 from a second-hand dealer. Indeed, it is one of the great safeguards against fraud with the commoner pieces of antique furniture, that ordinarily you can buy them for less than cheap reproductions can be made; but very few, if any, genuine antique carved bureaux exist. Only once in all my wanderings have I come across a Jacobean oak bureau with mouldings for ornament.

Besides the articles of oak furniture mentioned above, there were large cupboards, sometimes six feet long, made of panelled oak like the panelling of rooms. I am not sure that they were originally made as cupboards at all; some of them, no doubt, were

CARVED OAK BEDSTEAD at Agecroft Hall, Lancashire. Stuart period.

OAK DRESSER, with mouldings as decoration. Jacobean. (*In the possession of E. S. Grew, Esq.*)

cupboards built in a panelled room; but most of them, I suspect, were made out of old panelling when it was pulled out of the houses to make way for the plastered walls necessary to hang wall-papers upon. One of the curious things about antique furniture is, that there appear to have been no oak wash-stands or towel-airers. Oak cradles there were, and some of them are quite beautiful and worthy of preservation, just as are the oak kneading-troughs, though there is no longer any possible way of using them, and they should be looked upon as objects for museums rather than furniture to be put into the home.

There remain only the oak settles and oak chairs with which to deal. The oak settle is well-known to most people, and varies very little from the one illustrated (Plate 16), which is a very nice one in the possession of Mrs. Elam at Lenham Court, Kent, who has kindly had it photographed for use here. It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to say that, with plenty of cushions, an oak settle makes a very admirable piece of furniture for a hall or large dining-room. One oak settle, which I saw once, had the whole seat made of plaited strips of leather, about

a quarter of an inch thick and of the same width. It was very curious and remarkably comfortable, the leather giving with the weight of one's body.

Oak chairs will be dealt with in a special chapter devoted to chairs of all periods.

THE KING'S ROOM, Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk. The King's Room (so called because Henry VII occupied it in 1487) is in the gateway tower, and is a singularly beautiful example of a domestic interior. The walls have the linen-fold pattern in the panelling, and curious old tapestry above. The fine carved oak bedstead has a coverlet and curtains of green velvet, embroidered with various birds and beasts. This embroidery is said to be the work of Mary, Queen of Scots.

OAK "GRANDFATHER," OR LONG-CASE CLOCK.
(*At the School of Art Needle-work, South Kensington*)

THE THIRD CHAPTER

THE WALNUT WOOD PERIOD

EXT after oak came walnut furniture. It is particularly attractive by reason of its beauty and delicacy of workmanship, and for its unforced effects and charm of colour. I shall try to point out the little differences in detail by which the probable period of walnut furniture may be determined, for the study of these details has been a special pleasure to me, and it is perhaps because of them that I find walnut-wood furniture so attractive. It was not until I began to acquire pieces, that I became alive to the way furniture had gradually developed from carved oak to inlaid mahogany. One puts down changes in furniture to fashion and the individual influence of certain makers, when, like most fashions, the change is due more to the bringing into use of a new material than to anything else; for the material controls the fashion and workmanship, not the fashion and workmanship the material.

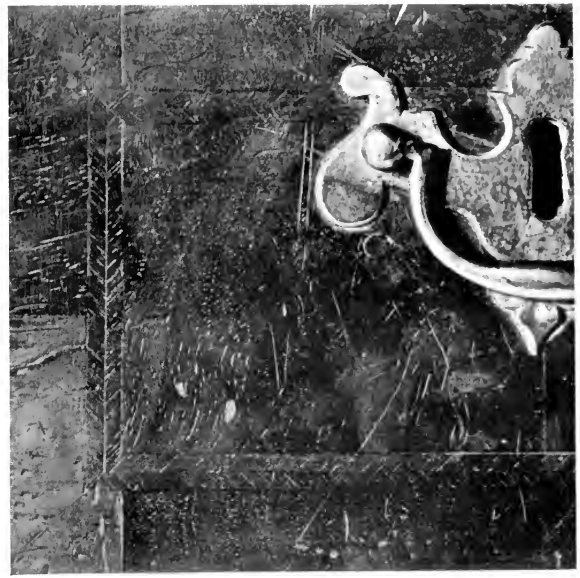
Thus the bringing into use of saw-cut

pollard walnut-wood veneer threw carved-oak furniture out of fashion. No doubt the beginning of the decline of carving was due to the first workman or master-craftsman who started inlaying oak in patterns with bog-oak and holly woods. There is a very fine example of this style of work in South Kensington Museum, the panelled room from Sizergh Castle, Westmoreland, before referred to; and there are occasional pieces of furniture to be met with with this decoration—such as dressers, oak chests, and oak bedsteads.

In the beginning of furniture making, probably it was not possible to get wood in planks much less than an inch thick, and no one, therefore, thought of inlaying as a form of decoration, and carving was the only course open. Later, when sawing became more of an art, and it was possible to get wood sawn to the astonishingly delicate thinness of an eighth or the sixteenth of an inch, people naturally delighted in the use of the wonderful new thing. I imagine that all thinly sawn wood was cut across the grain at first; that is to say, the trunk of the tree was cut up in rounds from the root to the branches, instead of lengthwise in planks;

OAK CHEST OF DRAWERS MADE IN TWO PIECES, with veneer of walnut on the front only. Stuart period. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This interesting piece of furniture shows the beginning of the use of veneering, and consequently it is an example of the first step in the departure from carved oak.

EARLY FORM OF CROSS-CUTTING ON STUART CHEST OF DRAWERS (Plate xxiii). This cross-cutting is quite at the outer edge of each drawer, and less elaborate than the feather pattern found on later pieces.



SPECIMEN OF CROSS-CUTTING ON WALNUT "TALL-BOY" CHEST OF DRAWERS (Plate xxvii). This cross-cutting consists of two narrow rows placed together, making a kind of feather pattern some distance from the edge of the drawer.

therefore we have to thank the man who first tried sawing thin rounds of wood off a tree for much of the beautiful furniture that has come down to us. Boxwood is cut across the grain to the present day, and so was all the wood used in inlaying old oak furniture. Having once obtained thin wood of beautiful colour and started glueing it on to oak in patterns, the idea of covering the whole surface of a piece of oak furniture (when finely figured oak was becoming more difficult to obtain) with these thin pieces of walnut wood, soon followed. A modern overworked furniture maker would have produced a quite ugly result in all probability, for he would, in his hurry, hardly have had time to invent one of the chief beauties of walnut-wood furniture, *i.e.* the accurate matching of the figure of the wood so that the grain makes a beautiful pattern. The wood used on any piece of old walnut furniture always appears to have been taken from the same tree. It is possible to trace the figure growing smaller through the various pieces, but these are always so exquisitely arranged that the pattern is an added charm.

The oldest pieces of walnut wood I have met with have the oak upon which the walnut

is laid showing quite frankly in some parts. For instance, the chest of drawers shown in the illustration (Plate 23), which is a peculiarly beautiful example of walnut wood, is oak at the top and sides flush with the moulding, though the moulding itself is walnut. Another thing that is interesting about this chest is, that it has rounded mouldings between and around the drawers and no moulding on the edge of the drawers themselves. If you want to understand this difference, pull out the drawer of a later piece of furniture, a quite modern chest will do, and you will find that the little moulded finish comes out with the drawer, because it is on the drawer itself and not on the chest, or "carcase" as the workman would call it. I was lucky enough to find most of the old handles and key-hole plates on this chest, all being perfect except for one or two of the handles, which have been carefully copied. In order to prevent the chipping off of the veneer or "facing," the drawers are bordered all round for about half an inch with walnut cut a different way of the wood, like a piece of stuff cut on the cross instead of on the straight; this is called "cross-cutting." In later pieces of walnut furniture you seldom find this at the edge of the drawers, and

WALNUT BUREAU, with cabinet top. William and Mary period. (*In the possession of Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) This bureau has unusually fine mouldings and panelled doors.

WALNUT "TALLBOY" CHEST OF DRAWERS. XVII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) The handles and key plates are original, The slide in the centre is unusual in a walnut chest.

when you do, it is always much less broad, and there is often a double row. As it does not show very clearly in an illustration of a complete piece of furniture, I have had photographs made of the two different kinds of cross-cutting (Plates 24 and 25), one of which occurs on the chest of drawers (Plate 23), which probably dates from James I. By the time of Charles II. the art of furniture making in walnut wood had become so highly finished and elaborate in workmanship that it has never been surpassed; indeed, to my thinking, it has never since been equalled. It was then that the exceedingly fine marqueterie work of boxwood or sycamore inlaid in walnut was made. This is sometimes so delicate that it is more like brush work than anything else, and one marvels afresh every time one sees any of it, at the beauty of both design and workmanship.

To return to this James I. chest, which is so instructive. It is made in two parts, the base or short stand (the part consisting of the three small drawers at the bottom) on which the actual chest of drawers stands, being quite separate from the chest itself. This is very characteristic of Stuart work, and is very familiar in later furniture in

such articles as the cabinets of small drawers enclosed with two doors, often of fine lacquer work. The very finest piece of Stuart furniture I ever saw was a large cabinet of walnut wood, covered with exquisite English marqueterie work, on a walnut-wood stand, which had spiral rails at the bottom of the frame to strengthen it. This was a Charles II. piece.

One more interesting feature of the James I. chest of drawers (Plate 20) remains to be pointed out. I refer to the feet, which, together with the other characteristics, are what make one certain of its early date. They do not show very clearly in the reproduction: their ground-plan is the square block of oak, but they are shaped so that they are smaller at the top, and curved at front and sides. In them, I think, one can just see the beginning of the hoof foot of later date, and also the beginning of the idea which later developed into the claw-and-ball foot. Many claw-and-ball foot chairs of Stuart period have their back legs shaped at the bottom much like the feet of this James I. chest. As an object lesson, this piece of furniture possesses so many features that are illuminative, that I have had to give a considerable amount of

SMALL WALNUT BUREAU. Early XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) The mouldings on this piece are on the drawers.

space to it. I only hope I have said enough to induce any one who possesses, or comes upon, any furniture of the same period to do all they can to preserve it untouched if possible; or, if in too bad a condition for that, to call in some expert to put it right, and on no account to let it go to an ordinary furniture man to be repaired or restored, and on no account to have its polish touched. No Stuart furniture, or any made before that period, was French polished, because French polish was not invented until a much later date. The exceedingly beautiful bright polish on walnut-wood furniture, the peculiar quality of which is that it retains its absolute transparency and whiteness so that the wood is unchanged after centuries, was obtained by the use of some remarkable varnish, the secret of which has been lost since the invention of French polish; therefore, if a piece of old walnut-wood furniture is French polished, half its value is destroyed for the connoisseur, who knows that without the old varnish the colour of the walnut will certainly change, probably within ten years' time.

Next in beauty and age to the James I. chest (referring only to pieces of which illustrations are given), comes the bureau with cabinet top, which is the property of Mr. Ashby

Sterry (Plate 26). I have seen very many after this pattern, called by the dealers Queen Anne, often, I regret to say, with the doors made hideous by having had looking-glass panels inserted; but Mr. Ashby Sterry's is the earliest and best I have ever yet seen, and I should date it William and Mary. It is difficult to point out from a photographic reproduction why this is so superior to the majority of others, because the differences are so slight, though so all-important to the real lover of old furniture, who can see at once the superiority in the planning of the old work as well as in the workmanship. The one thing is eminently satisfactory to live with, the other produces restlessness and a desire for change—for something else in its place—a feeling which the perfectly planned and made work of the true artist never produces. Think how common it is nowadays for middle-aged, or even young people, to refurnish as soon as they can afford it. Think how the getting rid of most of their household gods seems an absolute necessity which has been only held in check by the spirit of economy: this was a feeling unknown to people in the old days, when they had less furniture perhaps, but each piece was perfect of its kind, and had probably cost as

PLATE XXX

INLAID MAHOGANY SERPENTINE FRONTED SHIELD-SHAPED TOILETTE GLASS. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) This glass has very delicate uprights, with small turned iron ornaments. It is inlaid with satinwood.

PLATE XXXI

INLAID OAK TOILETTE GLASS, with mirror frame in walnut. Stuart period. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*)

much, or a great deal more, than a whole suite of modern machine-made furniture. The cottager one hundred and fifty years ago paid £9 sterling—when money was worth more than it is now—for his grandfather clock, and had it made for him by the best clockmaker of his county town or nearest large town. How many years of saving and waiting did a grandfather clock represent? But now there is no saving and no waiting—the rustic or townsman invests in a 1*s.* 10½*d.* American alarm clock, which is renewed every two or three years, and a £4 10*s.* suite of furniture, which is kept in an unused parlour, because he knows instinctively that it would stand no wear and tear, and there is no pride of possession. It rests with the middle classes, and the rich tradesmen who have made a sufficiency in business, to say whether good workmanship shall cease in the country or not. If they will have it, and will not mind paying for it, there are still enough of the older men left who have learnt their trades of joinery and cabinet-making from those that have gone before, and who retain, therefore, all the traditions to hand on to teach the younger men what joinery and cabinet-making should be. It would be a much greater thing to save

these traditions of the country, which has produced unquestionably the finest furniture in the world, than to spend large sums in constantly redecorating and refurnishing with the latest production of some well-known firm that makes furniture by the stack for the million. Happily the fashion for covering up ugly walls with pictures, hung so closely that they jostle each other in subject and design, is going out; and a hope may be expressed that the large sums which were formerly spent upon pictures will now be devoted to fostering the art of furniture-making. What is written above may give the impression that I dislike pictures, but that would be entirely wrong. I do not want to live in a room without any pictures at all, any more than I want to live in one that is overloaded with them. Good pictures should be hung separately on the walls, spaced as though the room were panelled, as all rooms should be, and as all rooms were until cheap wall-paper pushed out wooden panelling. With the pictures so hung, the need for a small amount, and a small amount only, of beautiful furniture will make itself felt. In an overcrowded, overcurtained room the furniture is not a feature, and it passes almost unnoticed.

THE DINING ROOM, Old Place, Sussex. Stuart period.

An illustration is given (Plate 27) of a tall chest of drawers in walnut wood, the natural development of the shorter chest on a stand. This chest also is in two pieces, but the lower half is higher, and although no more floor space is taken up, there is more room given for putting things away. Note that this chest has a writing slide, or slide on which to fold clothes; a most convenient shelf, which pulls out at will from among the drawers and forms a table on which to work or place things out of one's hands—a table which is always at hand and always empty, as no ordinary table ever is. The handles on this chest are original, but though a beautiful shape, are without the engraving or punched work of the earlier handles on the first-mentioned chest of drawers.

Pictures of a walnut-wood bureau and kneehole table (Plates 28 and 29), both charming pieces of later date, are also given. There were beautiful walnut-wood card-tables (there is one in Hampton Court Palace) on club feet, with sunk places for the candlesticks and deeper sunk oval-shaped hollows for the counters or money of the players. That there are no old walnut-wood dining-tables is probably because our practical ancestors did

not consider a veneered surface sufficiently durable for a dining-table.

I am always puzzled about the washstands of the walnut-wood period. There do not appear to have been any! I certainly have never seen one, or the remains of one. Probably any sort of small table was used (possibly the knee-hole table was made for that purpose) as a dressing-table, and looking-glasses hung upon the wall were common. Of the regular toilette glasses on standards to tilt, I have one that is partly oak and partly walnut, a tolerably early one (Plate 31); while Jacobean toilette glasses often with two tiers of drawers, and made of walnut wood, used to be fairly common. To me it seems that the much appreciated Chippendale and later makers—or masters, as it is now the fashion to call them—debased the most attractive and most suitable shape for a toilette-glass when they varied from the Jacobean form, and invented the shield-shape and oval toilette-glass.

EBONY AND TORTOISESHELL CABINET. This cabinet was given to Sir Christopher Wren by Queen Anne, but it is doubtful whether it is of that date. The framework is ebony and some lighter wood. The raised parts and the flats inside the moulding round the drawers and doors are of tortoiseshell laid over a bright red paste. The inside is inlaid with white ivory, and contains four mirrors divided by black pillars with gold capitals. The insides of the doors are inlaid with ivory. This piece of furniture has never been out of the possession of the Wren family, and it is reproduced here by permission of Mrs. Pigott, a lineal descendant of Sir Christopher Wren.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE INTRODUCTION OF MAHOGANY

UNLIKE oak and walnut wood, mahogany furniture is very frequently dated earlier than its actual age by the non-expert, though the difficulty of dating it is not great, the wood not having come into this country until 1724, when some was sent from the West Indies as a present to a certain Dr. Gibbon. He, so the story goes, finding that the workmen, who were building a house for him, would not use it, alleging it to be unworkable for their purpose, afterwards had a candle box made of some of it, possibly by Thomas Chippendale, who was a cabinet-maker living in St. Martin's Lane, near by the doctor. Anyhow, Thomas Chippendale appears to have been one of the first cabinet-makers to become enamoured of the new material, and his name has come down to us with renown as the producer of extremely beautiful mahogany furniture. That he only made mahogany furniture is impossible, if he was in business as a cabinet-maker when the

new wood was brought to this country, a fact which has been rather overlooked; and one wonders what he was making in the way of walnut-wood cabinets before his genius had its way with mahogany. He must have learnt his trade on the Queen Anne furniture of his immediate forerunners, if he ever learned cabinet making at all: I say "if" because he is reputed to have been a wood-carver by trade, and the son of a wood-carver.

He was an artist, undoubtedly, and must have been the possessor of a considerable personality, which enabled him to inspire his work-people with his own individuality and ideas; so we owe to him the great revolt from inlaying or veneering as a means of furniture decoration. He straightway went to carving, which had gone almost entirely out of fashion, on account of its unsuitability to the material, when faced walnut furniture took the place of solid oak.

That carving had never entirely ceased to be used on furniture we see by the familiar shell on the legs of tables and the legs and backs of Queen Anne chairs; but less and less of it had been used, and it was little short of a stroke of genius on Chippendale's part to

MAHOGANY OCCASIONAL TABLE, WITH FRET RAIL AND BRACKETS. Ince and Mayhew. This is a beautiful example of the possibility of combining lightness with strength in mahogany furniture. The two turned rails, held together by fretwork carving, show marvellous skill in the art of cabinet making.

MAHOGANY OCCASIONAL TABLE. Chippendale. This is a good specimen of fretwork edge, and the carved rail-support is very fine.

perceive that the way to bring the new wood into fashion against its exquisitely figured and much more delicately coloured predecessor, walnut, was to return to carving. This he did in a style which was his own certainly; but even the greatest artists are invariably indebted to the work of other men who have gone before them, and to me it seems that Chippendale, in his earliest and finest work, clearly shows his indebtedness to Grinling Gibbons, and the great school of wood-carvers of Stuart times. But for the Grinling Gibbons tradition in carving, it is possible that, in order to utilise the new material, Chippendale might have gone back to the Tudor for his models of decorative carving on furniture. One thinks, with a shudder, of the effect which would have been the result; and once again one places Chippendale on his high pedestal. He suited his workmanship to his material, and greatly as one may admire the beauty and decorative quality of Tudor carving on oak, one would dislike it on a finer wood calling for more elaborate treatment. Still it is irritating to hear Chippendale spoken of—as is often done—as a master who came suddenly into being, and produced from nothing a great period

in English furniture. To all students of older English furniture this is sheer heresy.

His work was excellent, and made again a great period in furniture, which had been slowly but surely growing less beautiful as it fell away from the earlier Stuart models; but in no case did he improve the form of a single piece of furniture which had existed before his time.

Take an undoubted Chippendale cabinet, the workmanship and carving of which are so exquisite that they compel admiration, and compare it with a Stuart cabinet. You will find the Stuart piece perfectly proportioned and perfectly constructed, with beautiful struts giving rigidity to the openwork frame on which the necessarily heavy top part stands, and your satisfaction will be absolute. Look at the Chippendale cabinet, and you will find yourself wondering how the absolutely unstrengthened frame, on its beautifully carved straight legs, can possibly support the heavy top; and you will have, besides, an uncomfortable feeling that the china within the glazed doors is not safe. This is where Chippendale fails; this is what in the end sent him out of fashion. I have met many people who cannot, or will not, care for his

PLAIN MAHOGANY SHELL-EDGED OCCASIONAL TABLE. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This is one of those tables with the top provided with hinges, so that it will swing over and make the table into a kind of screen.

PLAIN MAHOGANY CARD TABLE. (*In the possession of Egan Mew, Esq.*) This form of table is not uncommon in plain mahogany and in walnut. The claw and ball feet, and the shell decoration on the cabriole legs are particularly good.

slighter chairs on account of this feeling of insecurity.

In both cases there is nothing really weak in the construction, or the furniture would not have lasted for one hundred and fifty years; but any form which produces such an uncomfortable impression is removed from perfect taste; and therefore, much as I admire Chippendale's workmanship, I consider him a decadent in furniture-making, though I shall probably get few people to agree with me. The great cabinet-maker himself, in his later years, seems to have felt the necessity of showing that his forms were not so weak as they seemed, for he commenced the use of the obvious bracket in his tables, chairs, and cabinet-stands. The bracket shows in most cases his fret-work or Chinese period, and is an enhancement to the beauty of the furniture.

One of the features for which he has received much eulogy, as though he had invented it, is the claw-and-ball foot. This is absurd, for claw-and-ball feet were used over and over again on Stuart chairs, and he merely revived the use of them. Still, much credit is due to him for the skilful way in which he treated their revival.

There comes to my memory as I write,

a small mahogany medal cabinet on a stand, with high shouldered, or, technically speaking, cabriole legs and claw-and-ball feet, which is perhaps the most perfect thing in mahogany cabinets that has ever been made. It is now in the possession of Mr. Letts, but came originally from the famous Strawberry Hill collection, and is supposed to have been made for that apostle of taste, Horace Walpole. All uncomfortable feeling as to lack of strength is absent in this piece, on account of the cabriole legs, which make, without heaviness, the supporting stand larger than the cabinet, and thus produce the most complete feeling of satisfaction. But Chippendale did not invent that form; on the contrary, it had been used for a century before his time. He, in fact, departed from it, and employed the straight leg, which I maintain is structurally weak, and shows a retrograde tendency in taste.

In his later work he used frets, as he calls them, largely, and departed more and more from the carving of his early Grinling Gibbons inspired days. This may have been because he found, as his business developed into a large one, the cost of production of his earlier work too great; and he had to make furniture for

PLAIN MAHOGANY BOW-FRONTED CHEST OF DRAWERS. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This chest of drawers is of an unusually fine shape. The beautiful handles are original.

people of moderate means. Supplying a want is what we should call it now, or making furniture for the masses instead of for the classes. This was an inevitable development, certain to come sooner or later—as soon, in fact, as the poorer people began to ape the manners and customs of the richer. It was a much more beautiful world when the furniture made for cottages and farmhouses was designed for use in them instead of being a plainer, cheaper sort of copy of the furniture made for the palace; but we must not, I suppose, blame Chippendale for that. He was a tradesman doing the best for his trade—a master endeavouring to get the largest possible amount of employment for his workpeople; in fact, it was the factory creeping into existence, which was in the end to kill craftsmanship.

The only chance of the revival of craftsmanship possibly lies in the rather hopeless hope of a revival in taste, strong enough to induce the wealthy people of to-day or to-morrow to interest themselves in the production of beautiful things. They might inaugurate workshops where furniture for themselves could be made without thought of a profit. Many of the older houses in

the country are filled with unique examples of everything that is beautiful in furniture, which, if used as models, would soon teach taste to the artisan, who often has a great deal of that quality born in him, and only needs an outlet for it.

Another illustration (Plate 38) shows a very excellent bow-fronted chest of drawers. It is exceptionally beautiful although so plain, and the handles in particular should be observed. These are French in feeling, though not in workmanship, and the legs, which add so much to the character of the whole, show a striking variation from the straightness usual to the legs of chests of drawers.

Fine bow-fronted chests, such as this one, are rare, and should not be neglected by the collector. Serpentine chests of this period are more common, though not less esteemed, or less worthy of esteem. Their workmanship is irreproachable, and the design pleasing, though never so fine in the mahogany as in the older walnut-wood specimens, from which the idea of the serpentine front was probably taken.

Other large pieces of plain mahogany furniture were the tall chests of drawers on

PLAIN MAHOGANY WARDROBE, with panelled doors. Hepplewhite. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) The carved rose or rosette decoration is one of the distinguishing marks of Hepplewhite.

the same plan as the walnut one illustrated (Plate 27), but with the Greek-inspired moulding at the top, similar to that shown on the wardrobe in Plate .

This wardrobe, though a very plain one, is interesting because it has the roses or rosettes which are one of the distinguishing marks of Hepplewhite's work, at the four corners of the panels. It is a very perfectly proportioned piece, of admirable workmanship, so restrained and refined in detail as to suggest that it did not come into existence until after the work of the Adam brothers had begun to influence furniture makers towards the ultimate suppression of the floridness of detail belonging to the true Chippendale period.

The name of Hepplewhite, as a cabinet-maker, is best known after Chippendale's for mahogany furniture distinct from inlaid mahogany; and, of course, the designs of the Adam brothers, whose taste had a wide and far-reaching effect, are well known. The latter, however, were not cabinet-makers or craftsmen, but architects who designed furniture suited to the style of decoration they were using in the houses they were then building in various parts of London. Their

inspiration was purely Classic Greek, their ornamentation being the honeysuckle pattern, the ram's heads holding the wreath, the urn, and other unchanged Greek patterns, pure and delicate as well as beautiful, but not original in any way, except in their application to furniture.

The small makers must have been many, but their names have not come down to us, except in the case of Mainwaring, Copeland, Lock, Johnson, Ince, and Mayhew, whose names have been recorded mainly through the fact that they are appended to signed plates of designs published in various books, or in catalogues of designs for cabinet-making.

The idea of publishing a book of designs for woodwork and interior decoration appears to have been first conceived, or at any rate, first put into practice, by a certain W. Jones, who published such a book in 1737, which was followed in 1744 by the plates of Inigo Jones, and Kent, and in 1746 by those of Copeland. But these are, strictly speaking, architectural, and deal little with furniture in its ordinary sense. The first comprehensive book of designs for chairs, tables, cabinets, etc., was published by Thomas Chippendale

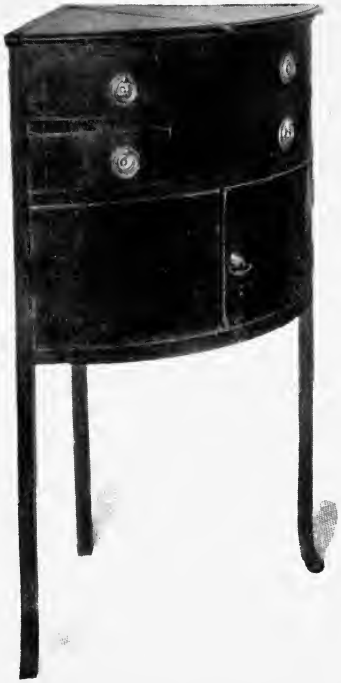
ADAM CABINET. Late period. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

CHIPPENDALE CHINA CABINET. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

in 1754. Hepplewhite's "Cabinet-maker's and Upholsterer's Guide" did not appear until 1787; and Sheraton's equally famous and valuable designs were first given to the trade and the public in 1792. Had it not been for the publication of these books or catalogues, we might never have known the names of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, or Sheraton, though the Adam brothers would have been famous in connection with their work as architects. However, what I am chiefly concerned with now is not the finest pieces of furniture made by any of these well-known masters, but a more or less general description of mahogany furniture of the eighteenth century, in the hope that what I write may be of some help to beginners who are absolutely ignorant on the subject and distrustful of their own taste and judgment. For their benefit I write one easily learnt "tip," *i.e.* that genuine antique mahogany furniture is solid and immensely heavy. This is particularly noticeable in the case of club-footed tables, either of the dining or breakfast pattern, or the folding card-table pattern. Pembroke tables—*i.e.* oblong tables with semi-circular or else oblong flaps, which, when up, are supported by brackets hinged

on immediately under the top—are also of solid mahogany; but being of much later date, and half the thickness at the top, are not particularly heavy. All club-footed mahogany tables are of early date. I have even seen some with the carved cockle-shell decoration, and they are always made of thicker wood than the later date mahogany furniture. Semi-circular card-tables—which open out by revolving on their frame into a circular table, and have a deep well between the top and the legs which is only accessible by moving round the top—are occasionally seen in mahogany. These, of course, being a Queen Anne pattern, and with club-footed legs, are of early date. Later mahogany card-tables with straight legs and tops based on the plan of the square, though generally with the square relieved by being cut into a serpentine form, are also of solid mahogany. When one comes to bureaux, book-cases, wardrobes, and knee-hole tables, and the larger pieces of furniture generally, it will be found that the early good ones are invariably made of oak faced with finely figured mahogany. Speaking generally, *no* mahogany furniture which is made up on deal is of any value.

PLATE XLII



PLAIN MAHOGANY CORNER TABLE. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This table opens at the top and has fittings for holding tea-caddy, sugar basin, etc., in the inside above the cupboard.

PLATE XLIII

PLAIN MAHOGANY DUMB-WAITER. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) Dumb-waiters apparently vary very little until seen side by side. This is a very elegant and nicely proportioned one, with twisted carving on the centre pillar, and good feet.

INTRODUCTION OF MAHOGANY

One of the most regrettable things that has happened to so many pieces of fine as well as modest mahogany furniture is the replacement of the original charming brass handles by turned wood knobs. This is a manifestation of the barbarous want of taste of the early Victorian. Certainly brass handles do get out of order occasionally. In course of time even, and unless they were quite the finest, and had originally undergone a process of mercurial gilding, they needed relacquering, but at least those of the earlier patterns fell down flat against the drawers when they were not in use, instead of projecting into space apparently for the express purpose of tearing women's dresses. Then, too, the yellow touch of colour of the brass handles is delightful on any furniture, so that the change from it to black knobs is incomprehensible; but it is history, and incontrovertible. Try, however, when buying an old piece to get it with one or two of the original handles and lock-plates on it, and *never* allow the dealer who is selling it you to replace the one or two originals with a complete set of even genuine old brasses off some other piece. Dealers frequently offer to do so in order to effect a sale;

but in nine cases out of ten the handles from one piece will be utterly unsuitable to the other—almost as much an eyesore as the plain black knob. It would be far better to get the best copies obtainable made of the remains of the originals, though these will be, when closely inspected, inferior in finish to the old ones; but that does not, after all, matter very much, for the imitations will not be apparent to any one but an expert, especially when they are in their places on the furniture.

The mahogany chairs and sofas will be dealt with in a separate chapter, but there are hosts of smaller articles of furniture—urn-stands, small tables, unusually long in the leg, nest-tables which, to be complete, should be in a set of four, candlestick-stands, besides knee-hole tables, generally small, and the old ones always with a cupboard in the middle, set back about half the depth of the drawers, and varying very little from the form of the walnut-wood one illustrated on Plate 29. Then there are mahogany-framed screens, with wonderful wooden hinges that allow the leaves to turn either way, and show absolutely no daylight through. These are a revelation in the art of cabinet-making, when one first comes across a specimen, but having done so,

ADAM SIDEBOARD. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

ADAM MIRROR. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

nothing else will ever satisfy one in the shape of a screen. Of washstands there are great numbers of the well-known corner shape, and also of the small square shape, unenclosed, in plain mahogany. These, by the way, are rapidly diminishing in number since the antique dealer has hit on the happy idea of converting them into tables with glass sides, for showing china! These washstands are a charming shape, yet scarcely any one thinks it possible to use them for their original purpose, because the hole for the basin is small. I delight in them for their original purpose; they take the largest modern basin, placing it at a most comfortable elevation for any one of average height, and the tops do not get splashed and soapy because the large basin extends over them, while a couple of shelves fixed on the wall above give one more than the usual accommodation for soap and brushes and toilette requisites. I should mention that originally the smaller holes in them were filled with turned mahogany shallow cups.

Every modern luxury seems to have come in with mahogany, for there are plenty of dainty towel-horses to match the washstands. They are like miniature kitchen clothes-airers, with long feet to keep them steady. There

are dumb-waiters and carving-tables of uninlaid mahogany, and very delightful plain trays, usually round ones; but there are singularly few sideboards of the carved mahogany period, that is to say, of the period before satinwood inlaying became the fashion. Mr. Orrock had in his possession a truly magnificent Adam sideboard (Plate 44), with its two end cupboards surmounted by their urn knife-boxes, and an elaborate rail of ormolu, not brass, across the back. This is perhaps the finest known, and possibly one of the finest ever made.

Knife-boxes and wine-coolers in mahogany are also worth the attention of collectors, and the same may be said of the thing which Chippendale not only invented, but made more exquisitely than it has ever been made before or since, namely, the bracket. One of his fine sets of bracket shelves, with fret sides jutting out slightly in the centre front of the lower shelves, is a thing to search for, and when found to save at any cost. Reproductions of these brackets should sell by the thousand if any modern maker had the enterprise to buy one of the originals, and have it carefully copied without trying to improve upon it!

GEORGE III's BEDSTEAD in the State Bedroom at Goodwood House, Sussex. A typical XVIII century bedstead, with fine carved posts in the Chippendale manner.

INTRODUCTION OF MAHOGANY

Mahogany four-post bedsteads used to be quite plentiful, though not, as far as the cornices are concerned, of the elaborate style shown in Chippendale's book. Posts were often to be met with which were not unlike those drawn by him, but the craze for easy cleanliness, and saving of trouble to the servants, which brought in the iron or brass bedstead, completely ousted the four-poster. They had gone mostly to the cottagers, who bought them because they were to be had for less money than the new iron ones; and they would still be in existence in quantities but for the bright idea invented by some clever lady, of using up the best of the old posts by turning them into what are called "lamp-stands." This idea was so successful and remunerative that it is quite difficult to find an old mahogany bedstead with beautiful posts at the present time, though many people are willing to purchase them. However, the metal bedstead has proved just as difficult to keep clean and in order as the wooden one, and fashion has decreed that wood is less unsightly. At the time of writing, wood is all in favour once more, and the few four-posters remaining may therefore escape cutting up. Many of the fine old country houses in

which England is so rich contain very beautiful carved bedsteads in oak and mahogany. Indeed, the state bedroom in an important house invariably contains a most imposing bed, and some of these, though rather florid in design, produce with their elaborate carving a very rich effect.

LIGNUM VITÆ CHEST OF DRAWERS ON STAND. Stuart period. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) The spiral legs tapering towards the top are very fine. Other features of interest are the rounded mouldings between the drawers, and the geometrical inlay of sycamore wood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

INLAID MAHOGANY AND SATINWOOD

WHEN Chippendale, Hepplewhite, the Adam brothers, and others seemed almost to have exhausted the possibilities of mahogany, it occurred to some one (we do not know for certain that it was Sheraton) to revert to inlaying as a means of decoration or embellishment for furniture. Whether Sheraton was the actual originator of the new style or not, the designs he drew for it, and the pieces which he had made of it, were so exquisite that this particular style is known exclusively by his name, though very few people can ever hope to be possessors of a veritable piece from his own small workshop in Soho.

The poor unsuccessful drawing master's book on furniture making, with its insistence on the necessity of drawing according to the rules of perspective, shows in a pathetic way that he was a born artist, just as much as his pieces of furniture show that he was also a born colourist. Born at Stockton-on-Tees, he

had served his time at cabinet-making, and in spite of all his efforts to do other things, he perforce lived by the making of furniture. Still, he could not content himself with being a tradesman. "He was an author, a bookseller, a teacher of drawing, and a preacher besides," says Adam Black, writing of him in his memoirs. And he says also, "I believe his abilities and resources are his ruin, for by attempting to do everything he does nothing." Would that most people's "nothing" might prove to be as much! I find myself wondering if his paintings or his writings would have given as much pleasure to the world as his furniture has undoubtedly given, supposing he had been able to devote himself to these arts.

Much as one may appreciate the workmanship of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and the Adam brothers, in the presence of a true piece of Sheraton's work, one cannot help feeling that their productions are coarse, almost blatant; that they were workmen—while Sheraton was a poet, and a poet blessed with the sense of colour. Of seeing genuine pieces of these two masters side by side only the fortunate few ever have a chance, for our national museums are wretchedly poor in specimens of any period of English

INLAID MAHOGANY BOOKCASE AND SECRETAIRE. Sheraton (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

furniture; and only the rich man, who is also a man of taste, is likely to be able to acquire a fine piece of Sheraton nowadays, when its value is at last appreciated.

Was Sheraton the introducer of satinwood, of kingwood, and of tulipwood? Did he, in seeking after colour, invent what is known as "harewood," which is sycamore dyed a delicate pale shade of brown? Was it he who, dyeing sycamore, thought also of staining some white wood the delicate green, which seems most exquisite of all as a companion to the apricot of satinwood? Strange woods had been used in the past (there were cabinets made of lignum vitæ or guaiacum, in Stuart times, see Plate 47), was it seeing one of them which urged him to seek for new kinds? or was it accident which brought satinwood into England, and within his reach, just at that time? Accident, at any rate, did not bring him harewood, or the green stained wood, both of which are peculiar to English furniture. Tulipwood was much used in France, to make cabinets and secretaires, but not to inlay with. However it came about, we are lucky in the possession of Sheraton's furniture. His exquisite satinwood pieces it is impossible

to reproduce, though the exact reproduction of all other, even the finest furniture, is, I know, possible for a consideration. Perhaps some people will be sorry to hear that absolutely indistinguishable reproductions can be made; I am most glad. I should like immediately to order the most perfect possible reproductions to be put in hand, so that when finished they might be placed in different buildings, far away from the originals, in order that, at any rate, the copies should remain, in case the regrettable accident of fire or a falling house should destroy the originals. I do not hanker after the pleasure of possessing a unique thing, but this does not mean that I have not a unique thing in my possession! It means that to possess the only one of its kind of anything, especially of a beautiful thing, fills me with something of alarm and a sense of responsibility towards my fellows, which I should be freed from could I commission the production of a duplicate. Therefore I am glad to know that the reproduction of them is possible.

To return to the work of Sheraton. Not only was his furniture exquisite in form, in shape, in colour, and in decoration as to the outside, but it was also full of neat

LIGHT-COLOURED MAHOGANY CHEST OF DRAWERS. Sheraton. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This chest of drawers contains elaborate dressing-table and writing-table fittings.

DRESSING TABLE OF MAHOGANY, inlaid with satinwood bands. XVIII century. This table opens at the top and discloses a looking-glass (on hinges), and the usual compartments made of cedar wood.

ENCLOSED WASHSTAND OF MAHOGANY, inlaid with satinwood bands. Late XVIII century. One of the many forms of enclosed washstands common at this period.

contrivances in the inside, carefully planned with much ingenuity, to add to the comfort of the owners without spoiling the appearance of the object.

He did not really invent the idea of his famous drawing- or writing-table, for the club-footed oak table (of which an illustration is given on Plate 15), was made many years before he was born, and its plan is much the same except for the side slides, which are a clever addition. Neither did he, I think, invent the enclosed washstand and more elaborate shaving tables, with their collapsible toilet-glasses, though of this we cannot be sure. But to him is due entirely the invention of the screen-table, which is both so elegant and so practical that one wonders why it has not continued to be made down to the present time, as another of his inventions—namely, folding library steps—has taken a permanent place in domestic furniture. One of the neatest of his contrivances was for the toilette-table, and consisted of a mirror swung on pivots in the doors of the upper part of the table, held in position by a spring when the door was to be closed. This mirror could be adjusted to any angle when released by touching the button attached to the spring,

and with one fixed in each door of the table, any lady would be furnished with a triple mirror such as we know the use of nowadays, only far superior on account of the adjustability of the glasses. He seems to have revelled in designing dressing-table fitments. One apparently ordinary chest of drawers in my possession (Plate 49) is an excellent example of this. The top drawer, on first being opened, discloses a baize-covered writing-slide, only different from an ordinary writing-table by reason of two sunk half-circles near the front, obvious handle places, with the help of which it is easy to slide it back. When this is done a looking-glass is revealed in the centre, while on both sides, exquisitely made in unpolished cedar-wood, are the most elaborate fittings—on the right hand for writing materials, and on the left for cosmetics apparently, for many of the boxes are lined with tin-foil. This is a characteristic Sheraton piece. Judging by the inlay, a band of satinwood half an inch wide close to the edge, it is an early piece. Its colour is curious. It is very light, though of mahogany, and it has a curious translucent appearance, almost as if it were made of satinwood stained red. I have seen a few other pieces with this same curious

INLAID MAHOGANY SERPENTINE FRONTED TOILETTE GLASS, with oval mirror. (*In the possession of Egan Mew, Esq.*)

INLAID MAHOGANY BOW-FRONTED TOILETTE GLASS, with mirror placed lengthwise. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*)

INLAID HAREWOOD PIER TABLE, with plaster-work decoration and carved legs gilt. Late XVIII century. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*)

TOP OF HAREWOOD PIER TABLE, inlaid with satinwood and green-stained wood etched.

appearance, one in particular, a serpentine-fronted chest-of-drawers, with a serpentine-fronted cabinet above, containing the toilette-glass and cosmetic boxes in small-sized drawers shut in by solid wood doors.

Sheraton seems to have disliked the deep red mahogany of Chippendale's and Hepplewhite's fancy, and to have communicated his dislike to others, for all the pieces of genuinely antique inlaid furniture are of lightish coloured mahogany, though not many have this curious translucent appearance. One of the things most commonly known as "Sheraton" is the pier-table. It is a half-circle table, always with an inlaid top, generally of harewood or satinwood, standing on four legs, taper legs in some cases, in others round or grooved, and carved and decorated with plaster work before they were gilt. Sheraton is responsible for the introduction of the round leg in English furniture. It is one of the few details which, I think, would "never have been missed."

Taste in furniture has been making for delicacy and simplicity from early Chippendale days right through the Hepplewhite reign, and it was not therefore entirely Sheraton's idiosyncrasy of idea that gave us the new

style of furniture, even though we credit him with inventing inlaying with various coloured woods. The Hepplewhite firm advertised their readiness to undertake orders for painted furniture some time earlier, so the feeling for colour must have been in the air, while the desire for delicacy of ornament is said to have spread to us from the Court of Marie Antoinette, where everything that was dainty, delicate, and minutely finished was then the vogue. However much this may have influenced public taste and private enterprise, our cabinet-makers were not content to make actual copies from the French, but evolved a style of their own, which is considered by many people more charming than that from which it was derived. Sheraton was the great designer of this style, to which his name is attached for all time, though only a few hundred pieces at most can have been made under his own personal supervision.

Of these, many pieces were made in satinwood and not in mahogany, and all the pieces of mahogany reasonably attributable to him that I have seen have been made of unusually light wood, with a singularly pleasing result. The so-called Sheraton, found occasionally all over the country, was probably the work of

SATINWOOD CABINET. Sheraton. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

BOW-FRONTED SATINWOOD COMMODE. Late XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This piece is in satinwood with bands of harewood. An etched pattern divides the cupboards from the drawers. The handles are the original ones and are said to be by Cipriani.

the ordinary cabinet-makers of the time, who found it necessary to follow the prevailing fashion. There is not a vast amount of genuine furniture of the Sheraton period, that is to say work which was inlaid at the time it was made; though there is a good deal of originally plain mahogany of later date, which the dealer has had inlaid since "Sheraton" became easy to sell. This is the pitfall into which the unwary may easily fall when starting buying. The only safeguard against such a mistake is a knowledge of or feeling for the forms which belong to the genuine inlaid period. These are much more elegant than the later styles and give the impression of lightness. When a piece appears heavy and a trifle clumsy, and its plan is little removed from the square or oblong shape, it may generally be left unacquired without fear of after regrets. This applies to inlaid wardrobes and sideboards particularly.

Sideboards, when they are good, are "very very good; but when they are bad, they are horrid." The best are perhaps the large semicircular ones of the same shape as the satinwood commode illustrated on Plate 56, but a good deal larger and of course with space underneath. Others of the serpentine-

front order, like the illustration, may safely be purchased when found. Those which should *not* be touched at any price are the ones which would be oblong except that the front ends are just rounded a little at the corners. Most people have seen these shapes, which generally had turned legs in their original state, though in the dealer's workshop they are changed for the taper variety. The little sideboard illustrated (Plate 57) is untouched and completely in its original state. It is an excellent object lesson for the study of good old inlaying. Observe the ovals in the end drawers—these ovals, sometimes circles, mark the good period in inlaid work; and look, too, at the variety in the shells, which seem each to have been specially drawn to suit the particular place it fills, and in this lies the secret of the beauty of the old inlaid work. Nowadays shells of several different sizes are made by the gross, and plastered on like postage stamps without any real regard for the plan of the piece they are to embellish. The corner cupboard (Plate 58) is not a specially good piece of inlaid work, but it serves as a specimen of a two-tier corner cupboard which is somewhat rare; and it also shows a pair of excellently designed glazed doors, so

MAHOGANY INLAID SIDEBOARD, with shaped front. Late XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) The inlay is kingwood, except the shells and hairlines, which are satinwood. The handles are original. There is no appearance of any rail ever having been at the back.

INLAID CORNER CUPBOARD. Late XVIII century. (*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*) The inlay consists of satinwood bands and shells of a rather uncommon pattern. The inside is painted white with gold edges to the shelves.

simple that there is nothing remarkable in the design, yet so charmingly planned and proportioned that few glazed doors are capable of giving one greater pleasure. One detail about glazed doors may be mentioned here. The earlier ones have quite flat woodwork for the pattern or lattice work between the glass. This one, like all the later ones, has a small and well-known moulding, similar to that used to form the panels on the doors of many houses which were built at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

To return to satinwood. This, if of the best period, is, like mahogany, veneered upon oak. Other signs of the best period in satinwood are the inlays of greenwood, harewood, or tulipwood. Satinwood inlaid with rosewood, generally speaking—especially if rosewood is the chief inlay—is not of the best period, though almost any piece of genuine satinwood is worth having on account of its exquisite colour. This colour is the outcome of age, and is absolutely unobtainable with modern satinwood, though every furniture maker will tell you otherwise. This is the reason, as I said earlier, why old satinwood realizes such high prices.

While on the subject of colour, let one more warning about the tricks of the trade be given. Genuine old satinwood is really scarce, and unfailingly commands a high price—a price far beyond the pocket of the generality of people who are merely seeking to furnish their homes. But "collectors" have heard that it is fashionable, and so inquire for it at every furniture shop. These "collectors" have mostly a smattering of knowledge, and know that genuine satinwood should be upon oak; so they pull out the drawers and examine the "carcase," and when they see it is veritably an old one, are satisfied that they are purchasing real satinwood. Alas! too often what they are buying really is the carcase of a Queen Anne piece of furniture, which was originally beautiful when it was covered with its carefully chosen and matched walnut-wood facing, but is now horrible in the sight of the connoisseur because it has been stripped and covered with new satinwood of bad colour, toned down to look like the old to the easily satisfied eyes of the ordinary buyer. This has been going on for some years, and one is horrified to think of the destruction of really beautiful old furniture which the satinwood craze is

SMALL SATINWOOD PEMBROKE TABLE, inlaid with tulipwood and greenwood slips. XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*)

SATINWOOD CARD TABLE, with broad band of Harewood inlay. XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*)

responsible for. A favourite form for this spurious satinwood is the bureau; and this for two reasons. Firstly, every one wants a bureau in his house; secondly, walnut-wood bureaux were plentiful. I am doubtful whether satinwood bureaux were ever made. There were satinwood writing-tables, satinwood cabinets, satinwood bookcases, sideboards, dressing-tables, washstands, screens, trays, tea-caddies; but to ask for a satinwood bureau is rather like asking for a satinwood four-poster. I trust the exposure of this very specious fraud may help to stop people buying satinwood bureaux, and so prevent the further destruction of Queen Anne walnut furniture. The small satinwood table illustrated (Plate 59) is a particularly charming example of a Pembroke table, more delicate in shape than most. The top of the centre—that is, the table when the leaves are down—is made of four triangular pieces of satinwood with the points meeting in the middle; then there is an inlaid oval of green wood; the edge has a rather broad band of tulip wood, while the legs and the drawer are decorated with a narrow inlay of the green to match the centre oval. The satinwood card-table illustrated (Plate 60) has a

broad band of harewood well set back from the edge, and finished on either side with very narrow strips of boxwood, alternating with black wood. It is unusual, because it is lined with satinwood; that is to say, when it is opened, instead of there being the usual green cloth common to most card-tables, there is a square table of polished satinwood, with a band of delicate inlay all round it. Besides the articles of furniture mentioned above, there was the square piano, the case of which was often elaborately treated with inlay, the frame on which it stood being also decorated. These square pianos have in many cases been broken up, no one being able to find a use for them in a room which contains a modern pianoforte, either grand or cottage. Lately, the dealers have been using up the old cases by converting them into writing-tables; while some people use them just as they are for dressing-tables. I, personally, have a weakness for their sweet, mellow tone as musical instruments on which to play the simple old accompaniment to the songs belonging to their time. It seems to me a pleasanter backing to a single human voice than the loud tones of the modern pianoforte. The one illustrated (Plate 61) is the finest ma-

LIGHT MAHOGANY SQUARE PIANO, inlaid with satinwood, ebony, and boxwood stained green. Late XVIII century. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*)

ONE OF A PAIR OF SATINWOOD PIER TABLES.
Sheraton. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

hogany inlaid one I have seen. Its inlay consists of a broad band of satinwood, bordered by a sort of cable pattern of ebony and boxwood, with strings of black, green, and red on either side.

I am fortunate in being able to give an illustration (Plate 62) of one of a pair of Sheraton pier-tables from Mr. Orrock's very fine collection. The other pier-table illustrated (Plate 54) has a harewood top inlaid with boxwood, greenwood, and satinwood. The broad satinwood border has a convolvulus wreath inlaid in it in greenwood and boxwood, with the veins of the leaves and flowers etched. There is a rosewood border on the outer edge. The legs and frame are carved wood with very delicate applied plaster work. It is believed to be a piece of genuine Sheraton. The frame is curiously like Pergolesi's work, so far as the design goes, but the workmanship differs from his ; and the legs and frame are entirely gilt, while Pergolesi's are generally part gilt and part white, like that illustrated from Mr. Orrock's collection. The other piece of satinwood illustrated (Plate 56) is the bow-fronted commode already mentioned. Its shape shows well in the picture, but the inlaying comes out rather

faintly, because it is of harewood finished at the edges with tiny lines of boxwood and ebony alternately. The harewood inlay stripes on either side of the centre drawers are etched with a delicate pattern diminishing as it goes towards the base. The handles, which are unusually fine lions' heads, are thought to be by Cipriani, and, fortunately, are complete, for they are quite unmatchable by any workmen of the present day.

SATINWOOD COMMODE, with panels painted by Angelica Kaufmann, R.A. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

PERGOLESI COMMODE, with panels painted by Angelica Kaufmann, R.A. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

PAINTED FURNITURE

QUITE one of the most beautiful pieces of painted furniture is at the South Kensington Museum. It is a toilette-table of exquisite shape by Sheraton, and painted by Angelica Kauffman.

Through the kindness of Mr. Orrock, illustrations are here given of two exceptionally fine painted pieces from his collection (Plates 63 and 64), both commodes. Besides these, illustrations are included of two Pergolesi china cabinets (Plates 65 and 66), both from the same collection. Pergolesi was an Italian who worked for the Adam brothers. His work being finely finished and made from their beautiful designs, commands a very high price; but as it is enamelled in white picked out with gold, with no wood showing, it is not attractive to those who appreciate good cabinet-making sufficiently to be offended at the covering up of the joinery with paint. A fine pier-table in Mr. Orrock's collection is enhanced in value by

a Wedgewood plaque which ornaments the centre of the front.

It is unlikely that readers of this will ever acquire a piece of furniture painted by Angelica Kauffman or made by Pergolesi, but it will do no harm for them to have some slight knowledge of such pieces.

Ordinary Pembroke tables of satinwood painted with wreaths of flowers are not very rare, and it is quite possible some reader may rescue one, which he should not hesitate to do. I have also seen satinwood screens and toilette-glasses painted, both of which were charming in their way; but the most common articles of painted furniture made were chairs, and they belong to the next chapter.

PERGOLESI CHINA CABINET, white enamel, with painted decorations. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

PERGOLESI CHINA CABINET, with marble top and marble plinth. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

CHAIRS AND SOFAS

HAVE thought it better to leave the chairs and "sophas," as they are called in Hepplewhite's book, to be treated by themselves in a separate chapter, since in this way it is easier to write of the evolution from the Tudor to the late Sheraton chair with a certain amount of clearness. Chairs are a very old institution; but they were not general in early times, stools and forms being considered good enough for every one but the master and mistress of the house. This, and the supposition that beech was, perhaps, always used, even in the earliest times, for this kind of furniture, would explain the scarcity of very old chairs, for beech has not the staying power of oak. Mr. Seymour Lucas has in his possession a massive oak one of the familiar chancel-stall order, though its owner is of opinion that it is not a church chair. It is a particularly good specimen, absolutely untouched by the restorer's hand, and both the Norman arch and the Tudor rose as well as the holly and bog-oak inlaying

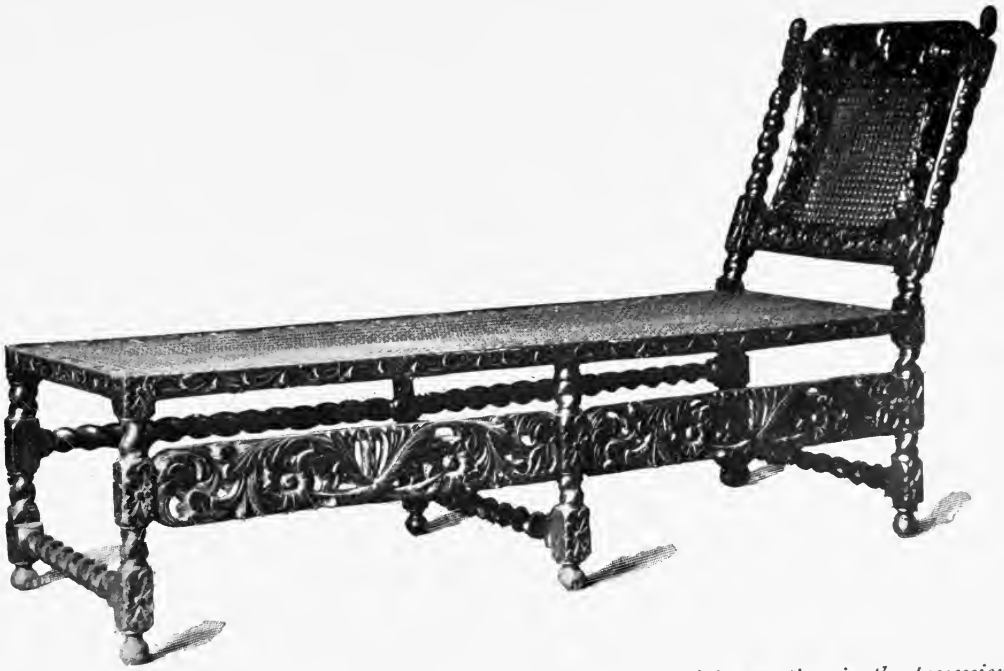
of that period are features of its decoration. This chair was not made for a farm or middle-class household. It must have been made for a castle, or else for the house of an exceedingly well-to-do burgess.

There were no sofas as early as this, the nearest approach to a sofa being the settle, which was the "form" grown grand and provided with a back. A few really fine carved settles of early date exist; one was to be seen a few years ago at Moyse's Hall, Bury St. Edmunds. It was a remarkably good specimen, longer than the settle of later date. It had eight legs along the front, and the back, which was carved, was lower than that of the settle we are accustomed to, which may be seen in use yet in some out-of-the-way country inns. These are usually almost plain, except for the relief afforded by their backs being panelled, like the one illustrated (Plate 16). I have never seen a genuine old settle with its legs enclosed forming a sort of chest, though I have been shown several that were originally chests which have had a back and arms supplied by the dealer, because in that form they have a ready sale as "nice old oak settles, so useful for a hall." Those modern useful articles are not for the

CARVED CHAIR. James I period. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) This chair is somewhat similar to the one at Knole, in which James I is supposed to have sat for his portrait to the painter Mytens.

CARVED WOOD CHAIR, stained dark brown. Stuart period. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This is a good specimen of the double panelled high back chair, with all the characteristics of the period—namely, the shell, the claw and ball feet, and the half circle stretcher.

STAINED WOOD ARM-CHAIR. Early William and Mary. (*In the possession of J. Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) The scroll-fronted frame and the scroll top of the back are unusually fine.



CARVED WALNUT "CHAISE-LONGUE." Stuart period. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) These early sofas are not very uncommon, but they are generally without the carving which makes this such a fine specimen. The more usual form has spiral rails on both sides, and perhaps a little carving at the head and on the frame.

lover of genuine old furniture at any price, even the cheapest; but a really fine old settle should be saved when found, particularly if a low-backed one of the earlier period. I have seen a mahogany settle very finely carved with a sort of shell pattern on the back; I only saw one, but was told by the dealer who showed it me that he had had a pair. They were probably made for the hall of some large country house about the middle of the eighteenth century.

To return to chairs. If we leave beech chairs out of count for the present, and continue to look at the evolution as it took place in the chairs of the nobles, we find the next thing after the stall shape, already referred to, is the so-called "Hamlet" chair. Whence came this name I do not know, unless it was acquired more or less lately through its having been the fashion for all the Hamlets on the stage to use a chair of this shape. Anyhow, the design is really old. One is still in existence at Knole, which is reputed to have been made for James I., and to have been used by him when sitting for his portrait to the painter Mytens. Its seat and back are covered with old velvet, and it has a certain charm, though nothing to the charm

of its successor the tall-backed chair. By the kindness of Mr. Letts, an illustration is given of a chair of a similar type (Plate 67). This is the low-backed armchair, which was apparently the form subsequently displaced by the more dignified and far more comfortable high-backed kind known to us as the "Stuart" and the "William and Mary" chair.

Other illustrations include several reproductions of very beautiful high-backed chairs, some from Mr. Seymour Lucas's collection and others in the possession of Mr. Letts and Mr. Ashby Sterry. A beech chair carved and painted black is in the possession of Mr. Seymour Lucas. It is unusually large in size, and is probably of the date of Charles I. Sometimes these tall-backed chairs are oak, but most generally they are beech. Occasionally they are of walnut, but these are of later date, and are generally smaller in size, though still high-backed. Quite one of the most beautiful forms, to my thinking, is that with the double panelled cane back, like the illustration (Plate 68). These chairs, with their claw-and-ball feet, cabriole front legs, half-circular struttings, and shell carving, combine almost every distinguishing mark of the Stuart

SHORT WALNUT-WOOD SETTEE. William and Mary period. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) The carved scrolls with arches in the centre are characteristic of this period.

STUFFED EASY CHAIR, with wing sides. Queen Anne period. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This chair has a walnut frame.

WALNUT-WOOD CHAIR, with turned rail. Queen Anne period. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) This settee or chair has the curious wide seat which obtained until Chippendale departed from it in his late period.

WALNUT FRAMED CHAIR. (*In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A.*) The chief features of this chair are the beautiful half-circle rails and finely-turned legs.

period. They are beech or pearwood, painted a very dark brown, and their probable date is Charles II. The illustration shows one of a set of six, two of which still retain their original old velvet cushions.

One may almost say that the higher the back the earlier the chair, though this remark will not apply to makes before the time of Charles I. Afterwards the height of the backs gradually declined, though they were still very high, according to our modern ideas, in William and Mary's reign. The difference was quite well marked by Queen Anne's reign, however, as will be proved by an examination of the types of Queen Anne chair, which must have been in ordinary use until they were displaced by the Chippendale models. An illustration is given of a stained-wood armchair of the William and Mary period (Plate 69), with an unusually fine scroll-fronted frame. Up to six or seven years ago, Queen Anne chairs were tolerably common and extraordinarily cheap, for every one was seeking Chippendale, and would look at nothing else; but now the dealers find there is a ready sale for "Queen Anne" pieces, so, of course, they have gone up in price. I do not remember that the really

finely carved Charles or James chairs were ever very cheap. Perhaps the reason of this was that the dealer, though not always a man of taste, did generally know the cost of labour represented by fine carving. I, personally, have bought Queen Anne and Chippendale chairs for as little as five shillings each years ago, but was never offered a carved Jacobean or Stuart chair for less than thirty-five shillings.

Of early sofas an illustration is included (Plate 70) of a Stuart piece, with an exquisitely carved front rail and the characteristic spiral struts. This sofa has a cane seat and back. Upholstery on sofas or settees and easy-chairs appears to have crept into fashion somewhat later. An illustration (Plate 71) is given of a William and Mary settee with a stuffed back. It also has a fine carved rail in the front, but this rail seems a sadly rude and degenerate one when we compare it with the rail on the Stuart sofa.

Another illustration (Plate 72), shows a Queen Anne stuffed easy-chair with wing sides, or what we call now a grandfather-chair, and this brings me down to the Chippendale period, rich in so many varied forms. First, however, I would like to point out the reasons

CARVED STAINED-WOOD CHAIR. Stuart period. (*In the possession of J. Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) This chair is interesting because it has a carved wood centre panel instead of a cane one.

STAINED WOOD CHAIR, with single cane panel. Stuart period. (*In the possession of J. Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) This chair is much spoilt in appearance by the stuffed seat. It would have a cane seat in its original condition, and, indeed, the cane still exists under the stuffing.

WALNUT-WOOD CHAIR. (*In the possession of J. Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) This is a beautiful specimen of the cane back chair of a period when makers were beginning to try to strengthen the tall backs, and hit on the device of pillars at the sides for this purpose. The chair should of course have the stuffed seat removed in order to uncover the original caning.

WALNUT-WOOD SETTEE. Queen Anne period. This is a good example of the rather squat heavy shape of the period. The claw and ball feet, shells, and scroll back are all finely carved.

for dating the Queen Anne grandfather-chair. It is walnut wood; secondly, the legs and turned struts are typical of the period, while the shape, when compared with a later one, is finer. The curve of the arms, too, is bolder, and the wings are set on to the back not quite at a right angle, as they are in later chairs. A much finer chair of this period is the one from Mr. Seymour Lucas's collection illustrated (Plate 73); but perhaps less interesting to the ordinary buyer of antique furniture, because it is scarcely likely that he will come across one. Before I leave early chairs, I want to say particularly that though there are many very fine ones with straight backs—witness those from Mr. Ashby Sterry's and Mr. Letts's collections—in my opinion, the finest have always curved backs which fit the figure of the person sitting on them so delightfully that the chairs are more comfortable than any others. Possibly it was because this curve in time was gradually omitted that the high-backed chair went out of fashion, as a really straight back is not comfortable. Very often Stuart and later chairs, which were made with cane backs and seats, have been stuffed over—sometimes the backs, but oftener the seats only. Generally the caning

remains, and can be felt distinctly by just putting the hand under the seat. Of course the stuffing should be removed, and the original caning uncovered. The reader may be interested to hear that three of the walnut-wood high-backed chairs from Mr. Ashby Sterry's collection were originally the property of Albert Smith, which shows that there were some literary men with taste even in the early sixties.

What is usually looked upon as the great chair period began about 1728, when Chippendale started making use of mahogany. A particularly interesting specimen of an early period of Chippendale stuffed chair is given in the illustration (Plate 79). The shape of this differs very little from the Queen Anne one belonging to Mr. Lucas (Plate 73). Like his, it is shallow, *i.e.* its seat is wider across the front from arm to arm than it is from back to front. Its legs are the cabriole shape, with club feet, but it has no struts, and the carving is quite different in style from the bolder work of the earlier period. When I bought this chair, it was covered with several layers of dirty materials, but underneath them all was the original orange woollen rep, finished all round with brass studs, giving

CARVED MAHOGANY STUFFED EASY CHAIR. Early Chippendale. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This chair, which is very delicately carved, is of a particularly elegant shape, with a serpentine front. It had its original woollen covering fixed all round with brass nails when it came into its present owner's possession.

MAHOGANY STUFFED ARM-CHAIR. Late Chippendale. (*In the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) A characteristic chair of the late Chippendale period.

CHIPPENDALE RIBBON-BACK SETTEE. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

PLATE LXXXII

CHIPPENDALE RIBBON-BACK CHAIR.

PLATE LXXXIII

HEPPLEWHITE CHAIR.

(*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

a good idea of what the chair was like when it left the maker's hands. This woollen rep, though one hundred and fifty years old, is still so strong that it is untearable, and its colour is hardly changed. I know no covering so harmonious or so durable, but though I have tried all the largest firms in London, I am unable to get the material reproduced. I intend to go on trying, however, for I believe most possessors of old furniture would, like myself, be thankful to be able to obtain a reproduction of one of the characteristic coverings of the period for their chairs or settees, which are often almost spoilt by incongruous modern upholstering.

Another example of a Chippendale stuffed chair is illustrated on Plate 80. This one is in Chippendale's later manner, with fretwork rails and carving to match on the arms. Though fine of its period, its shape is quite commonplace beside the earlier one, though this is not so evident in the reproduction as it is when one sees the actual chair. It is not very likely that the ordinary searcher after moderate-priced chairs will find such fine examples as these, but any stuffed chairs approaching them in shape are worth buying at the full price of any good modern "easy-

chair," *i.e.* at £8 or £10. In no case, though, should any such purchase be re-stuffed with springs or buttoned down stuffing, either of which styles completely spoils them. I have seen an old easy-chair and also an old settee or double-ended sofa, which had been sent to a well-known London firm of upholsterers to be done up, utterly ruined in this way. As a general rule, for the safe guidance of people who wish for old furniture, let me say here, that my experience is, that there is no way of getting antique furniture done up satisfactorily out of one's own house. The best thing to do, though not the cheapest perhaps, is to have a workman sent to the furniture, instead of letting the furniture go to the workman, and then to make him understand that you intend to have the old work done in the old way as nearly as possible, and to visit him yourself several times during the day in order to make sure that he is keeping as near as possible to the original. Of course, this means paying by time, and it is impossible for an estimate of the cost to be given; but it is the only satisfactory way to get the restoring of old furniture done, and it is often no more expensive than the ordinary way of procuring an

PLATE LXXXIV

HEPPLEWHITE CHAIR.
(*In the possession of Mrs. Wyllie.*)
A typical wheat-ear chair.

PLATE LXXXV

PERGOLESI CHAIR.
(*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

PLATE LXXXVI

CARVED CHAIR, with cane seat and back. Probably Stuart period. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*)

PLATE LXXXVII

MAHOGANY CHAIR, with honeysuckle-pattern back. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) The honeysuckle pattern is accredited to the Hepplewhite firm, but the open work and carved legs of this chair belong to a Chippendale pattern which makes it a most unusual specimen.

estimate. Moreover, if you take into account the almost certain spoiling of the piece which will result if it is sent away and done by estimate, it is decidedly cheaper in the end.

Of Chippendale's ribbon-backed or carved-back chairs and settees, illustrations are given of some very fine examples from Mr. Orrock's collection (Plates 81 and 82). These need no description or comment, since the illustrations speak for themselves, and nowadays almost every one knows that any chairs approaching these are very well worth saving as a money speculation, even if not for their intrinsic beauty.

Another celebrated maker of chairs was Hepplewhite (see Plate 83), the first known maker to depart from the square-shaped back. His chairs usually show the shield-shaped back, and, as the basis for their ornamentation, either the wheat-ear, the honey-suckle flower, or the Prince of Wales feathers. Yet another chairmaker's style is shown in Plate 89, which is characteristic of Mainwaring, one of Chippendale's minor contemporaries.

Much more elaborate were the beautiful chairs and settees made by Pergolesi for the Adam brothers. These are not so generally

well known, but the style is excellently shown in the illustrations from the very fine and perfect specimens in Mr. Orrock's collection (Plates 85, 91, and 92), which should make it possible for any one to recognize Pergolesi's work, if lucky enough to come across it. What does not show in the illustrations is the fact that these pieces are white enamelled picked out with gold, and the coverings are cashmere, painted with a design exactly suiting the chair or settee.

In conclusion I come to Sheraton's chairs. The prince of cabinet-makers did not make very beautiful chairs, but he did entirely alter the style that had been in favour before. He adopted or invented the round leg and the straight square back-rail, supported by the two principal uprights from the back legs, with a light interlaced centre-support. This, at a later period, degenerated into the hideous chair of early Victorian days, by the simple process of curving the top rail and replacing the slender perpendicular supports by the incredibly inartistic horizontal one, which is now, I believe, only used in the cheapest form of Windsor chair made for kitchen use.

Sheraton's chairs are often very beautiful

PLATE LXXXVIII

WALNUT-WOOD CHAIR, with carved shell on back and legs. Early Georgian. (*One of a set in the possession of F. Fenn, Esq.*) This kind of chair was in fashion for a long period, and marks the stage between the high-

PLATE LXXXIX

MAHOGANY CHAIR. Probably by Mainwaring. (*In the possession of P. Egerton Hubbard, Esq.*) An excellent specimen of the work of one of the less famous chair-makers. The workmanship is admirable.

in colour, being generally of satinwood or pale mahogany inlaid with satinwood, and the workmanship is very fine and delicate. Of course, for a room which is furnished in Sheraton style, they are far more suitable than any others. Few people seem to realize this, for it is quite usual to see a room furnished with delicately inlaid Sheraton-inspired furniture with heavy claw-and-ball footed Chippendale chairs, the effect being quite incongruous and untasteful. If there are several styles of antique furniture represented in the room it does not matter, but when the sideboard, the table, and the principal pieces are all Sheraton in style, it quite spoils the whole effect if the chairs are out of character; and there is the less excuse, seeing that Sheraton-style are still the cheapest antique chairs of the later makes on the market.

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Sketches of Antique Furniture. By W. C. OGDEN.

Examples of Carved Oak Work in Furniture. By W. B. SANDERS.

Specimens of Furniture. By HENRY SHAW.

Book of Designs. By THOMAS SHERATON.

Cabinet Makers' and Upholsterers' Drawing Book. By THOMAS SHERATON.

Cabinet Makers' Dictionary. By THOMAS SHERATON.

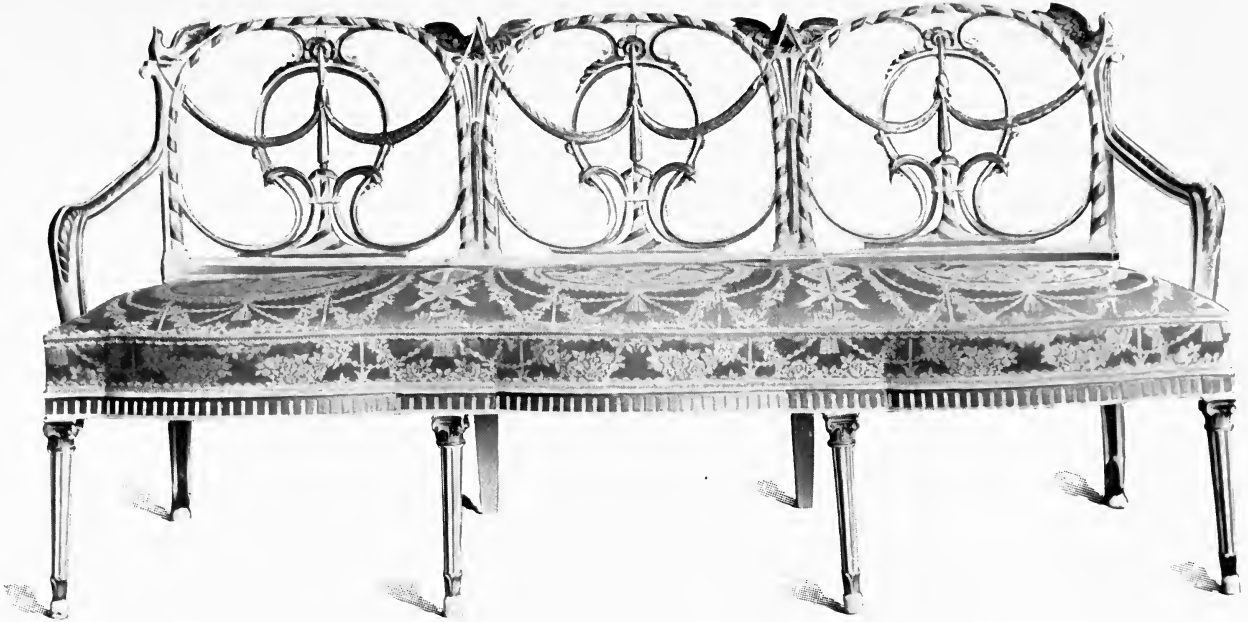
Furniture of our Forefathers. By ESTHER SINGLETON.

English Furniture. By T. A. STRANGE.

Homes of our Forefathers. By WRIGHT.

CARVED MAHOGANY SETTEE. Probably by Chippendale. (*At one time in the possession of S. E. Letts, Esq.*) This form of settee is not uncommon without the carving on the legs and front rail. The original coverings were generally woollen repp of a fine orange or dull brick-red colour.

PERGOLESI SETTEE. White enamel picked out with gold; painted woollen upholstering. (*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)



PERGOLESI SETTEE.

(*From the collection of James Orrock, Esq.*)

PLATE XCIII

WHEEL-BACK WINDSOR CHAIR. (*In the possession of J. Ashby Sterry, Esq.*) Wheel-back Windsor chairs are quite common, but they generally have the wheel pattern cut in the centre of the solid back piece, and are without the cabriole

PLATE XCIV

RAIL-BACK BEECH-WOOD CHAIR. Probably Stuart period. This is, of course, a cottage chair. This form seems to have been usual for many years, only varying in the legs, which gradually became plainer and plainer. The club feet and turned front rail gradually

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